

3rd Sunday of Advent, Cycle C
Zephaniah 3:14-18A
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18
December 13, 2015
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Our work at the Garaventa Center keeps my colleague Karen Eifler and me constantly on the move. Often, one of us is rushing into the office while the other is rushing out. On these occasions, Karen will sometimes say, “anticipatory set,” and follow up with a hurried word about some new idea or piece of news that she intends to unfold at greater length when we have time. As a result, “anticipatory set” has become something of a catch phrase around our place.

Karen is a professor of Education, and the phrase features in her scholarly discipline. As I understand it, in educational psychology, an anticipatory set is a short, pithy, preview of material to be presented in detail at a later date. It’s intended to whet students’ appetite for what is yet to come. If the new material is related to what has gone before, the anticipatory set reminds them of what they already know. If the material will be entirely new to the students, the anticipatory set creates space in their brains and in their hearts for what is to come. It does this by changing neural networks and synapses to create new connections. As you can imagine, working with Karen has certainly changed *my* brain!

This third Sunday of Advent is traditionally known as “Gaudete Sunday.” “Gaudete” is the Latin word for “rejoice.” The origins of Gaudete Sunday go back to a time when Advent was understood as a penitential season – a kind of “second Lent.” “Rejoice Sunday” was

established by the Church out of pastoral concern for Christians who might be pushing their penitential practices too far. It was intended to afford them an occasion to relax their austerity in anticipation of the joyful feast soon to come. For some Christians it may still serve this purpose.

For them, and for all of us really, this Gaudete Sunday can serve as a kind of spiritual anticipatory set. Our readings, with their insistent demand that we be joyful, are a reminder of what we already know: that by his saving death and Resurrection, Christ, has already accomplished our redemption. They also prepare us for what is yet to come, by creating space in our minds and in our hearts for the holy child whose birth we will soon celebrate. The Christmas season will be the time to reflect fully on the meaning of his birth for each of us. Meanwhile, in the words of St. Paul to the Philippians:

Rejoice in the Lord always.

I shall say it again: rejoice!

Your kindness should be known to all.

The Lord is near.

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.

Then the *peace* of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.